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JOHN WESLEY AND CHARLES SIMEON:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
OF  
EARLY EVANGELICALISM  
WITHIN  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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by  
James Paul Haney, Jr.  
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## INTRODUCTION

John Wesley and Charles Simeon are probably the outstanding evangelical clergymen of two successive generations in the Church of England. Wesley represents the generation of the vast middle part of the eighteenth century, while Simeon represents that of the lat eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is interesting to compare the two men, for by so doing one may observe the various shifts of emphasis that occurred from the one generation to the next within the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church.

Of course, any such comparison cannot adequately be made by completely isolating the two men from their various contemporaries. Therefore, it will also be necessary to give some consideration to at least a few of the other important figures who were involved in the early movement in England. Such consideration is necessary to throw light upon the background and upon the forces of the time which so prominently figured in moulding the lives and thoughts of these two men.

Needless to say, the growth of evangelicalism in eighteenth century England was vast, affecting both the Anglican and the Dissenting Churches. The various leaders of the movement came from a wide variety of backgrounds, including both rich and poor, men and women, clergy and laity, scholars

and those without education.

Because of such enormous diversity within the evangelical movement, this paper of necessity will have to confine itself in two ways. First, it will deal only with those clergy who considered themselves to be, and were, members of the Established Church. Thus, Wesley will be given considerable attention, while the later Methodists of Simeon's generation will not be given detailed treatment. Second, the paper will deal with the movement only with respect to the clergy who were involved in it. This is not to deny that such laymen as William Cowper, Selina - The Countess of Huntington, Hannah More, and William Wilberforce, to mention only a few, were very important figures within the early movement. Rather, it is to keep the paper within reasonable limits.

## 1. BACKGROUND - THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SCENE

One way to describe the eighteenth century English religious scene is to say that a close and intimate relationship existed between the fields of religion and politics. Not only did religious controversies affect the political situation, but also the political situation had a very great influence upon ecclesiastical matters.

With the Hanoverian accession to the throne in 1714, the Whig faction in politics found itself coming into more and more prominence. The effect of this change upon the church was decisive, for the church began to have its vacant Sees filled by the relatives and friends of the Whig nobility. While this did tend to improve the economic situation of the church, it also had a very adverse effect upon the general morality of England. The church began to be a place where the members of nobility sought such things as wealth and power to the total neglect of the pastoral function of their office. The bishops formed a considerable section of the House of Lords, spending seven or eight months in London, and the rest in their dioceses tending to ecclesiastical duties.<sup>1</sup>

The system of preferment also existed, through which bishops advanced from poorer to richer dioceses, provided

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<sup>1</sup>J. R. H. Moorman, A History of the Church in England, (London, 1953), p. 278.

they had the good will of the party in power. There was also the system of pluralities, whereby a clergyman could hold several appointments or offices without ever appearing in some of them, farming them out to a lesser clergyman for a very small sum, while collecting the full salary himself. It has been estimated that well over half the incumbents of English parishes in the eighteenth century were absentees of this sort.<sup>2</sup> All of this contributed to a general emphasis upon worldly and material goods to the neglect of moral values.

Such complacency and worldliness on the part of the ecclesiastical leaders no doubt had a very serious effect upon the English church people, who found themselves provided with little moral leadership. Indeed, the clergy as a class were so unpopular that J. R. H. Moorman has written "the rich were despised as ambitious hypocrites, the poor as ignorant peasants".<sup>3</sup> As a result, England suffered a great loss of moral values. Hangings became a source of public entertainment, as did gambling, drinking, and sexual debauchery.<sup>4</sup> Education remained low, and personal assaults were the order of the day. Very little value was placed upon human life, with the death penalty being mandatory for even extremely petty crimes. The church of the early eighteenth century certainly did not provide spiritual leadership for the average English Christian. Instead, the ecclesiastical leaders were more concerned with

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>4</sup> Ingvar Haddal, John Wesley, (New York, 1961), p. 80.

their own advancement, privileges, and prestige.

The church also made little effort to adjust itself to the great changes that were occurring in society as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Large towns came into existence, a new middle class was created, family roots were disrupted, child labor became a way of life, and the church continued to go its way, largely unaffected and ineffective. Its general attitude to the vast changes that were taking place was basically one of indifference.

Another factor which greatly influenced the church of this era was the rise of Deism. The Deists thought of religion as a system of ideas and moral precepts that were self-evident in nature to the rational mind. The church found it very difficult to meet the Deist challenge, basically because "churchmen had themselves come to think in the same categories as the Deists, and were therefore at a great disadvantage in meeting an adversary whose use of the available weapons was perhaps more skillful than their own".<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the situation was such that several bishops often had to warn their clergy "against reducing revelation to reason, faith to philosophy, Christian ethics to prudential morality, and worship to a mere preliminary to the rational discourses which did duty for sermons".<sup>6</sup>

From the above, it can be seen that the problems of

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<sup>5</sup>Stephen Neill, Anglicanism, (London, 1958), p. 183.

<sup>6</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 54.

the Established Church at the beginning of the eighteenth century were basically twofold. First, political and material interests were greatly hindering the spiritual responsibilities of the clergy. Society was dissipating and becoming unchurched, and little was being done to stem the current. Second, the rise of Deism was posing an intellectual threat which the inadequate theology of the worldly Hanoverian Church found difficult to answer. The time was ripe for the emergence of a new force dedicated to the salvation of English society, a force which in turn might also provide the spiritual leadership necessary for the strengthening and salvation of the church. This force was the evangelical revival, and foremost among its leaders was John Wesley.

## II. JOHN WESLEY

### A. The Man

John Wesley was born in 1703, the son of the rector of Epworth, a parish in Northern England. He remained at Epworth until 1713, at which time he began his preparatory education at the Charterhouse School in London. It is almost impossible to overestimate the profound effect that Wesley's early home life had upon his later religious thought. Both his father and mother were remarkable individuals, each having been brought up in a Puritan family before joining the Church of England. The family life at Epworth was one of complete discipline, the philosophy being that the only way to bring up children was to require a life of complete supervision and obedience. Such a home background had two lasting results upon Wesley. First, the ethical teachings with which Wesley became accustomed were the strict, Calvinistic, pietistic ethics of the Puritan Church. While Wesley was not a Calvinist, he was Calvinistic in his ethical standards. Second, he inherited a very rigid concept of personal discipline or "method", which remained with him throughout his life.

From 1720 to 1725, Wesley was a student at Christ Church, Oxford. Here he began to read the works of William Law, Jeremy Taylor, and Thomas' a Kempis. He was greatly impressed by these writers, and thus sought to find his own

salvation through living a more holy life than the rest of mankind. In 1725 he was ordained Deacon in the Church of England, and the next year was elected a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. In 1728 he was ordained Priest.

After spending two years (1727 to 1729) assisting his father at Epworth and Wroote, Wesley returned to Oxford and discovered a club founded by his younger brother Charles, who then was an undergraduate at Christ Church. The purpose of the club was to meet regularly for study and devotion, so that the members might achieve greater holiness. John Wesley became the leader of this group, who were soon being called "Methodists" because of the disciplined life which all its members were required to lead. This club led Wesley to discover that holiness was a group, not an individual, experience. This principle was later to become the framework for the Methodist societies that arose all over England.

In 1735, Wesley accepted appointment as Chaplain to the new colony in Georgia. He had one basic motive for accepting this appointment: to save his own soul. Though this did not work out as he had hoped, Wesley was able to come to grips with the problems of faith and salvation that had been troubling him. When he left the colony in 1737, after a ministry which can only be described as a complete failure, Wesley no doubt realized that his type of religion was neither doing him much good nor helping anyone else. He knew that he lacked a certain assurance of faith which he desperately wanted. On his return voyage from America, he wrote:

It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why, what I the least of all suspected, that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God. .... This, then, have I learned in the ends of the earth, that I am fallen short of the glory of God. The faith I want is a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God.<sup>7</sup>

What did, however, make the two years in America of great importance to Wesley was the fact that he became exposed to the Moravian Brethren. Coming at a time of unexpected failure, this was directly responsible for Wesley's theological change. The Moravians were a pietistic sect that had been founded in Germany. Wesley's first exposure to their Christian ways occurred during the ocean voyage to Georgia, when a severe storm threatened their ship. Wesley found himself terrified, but the Moravians carried on their religious services in complete calm. It amazed him that people could trust strongly enough in the Lord so that they had no fear of death. Wesley became acquainted with the leaders of the sect, and was both fascinated and troubled by their doctrine of justification by faith alone. More important, he began to question his own position.

On leaving Georgia in 1737, Wesley continued his association with the Moravians. He formed a close friendship with Peter Bohler, a Moravian leader who he met on the return voyage to England. This was a trying time for Wesley.

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<sup>7</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 48.

He was not sure whether he should continue preaching until he had fully resolved his problem, to which Bohler advised that "he must purge himself of his philosophy and preach faith till he had it, and after getting it, preach faith because he had it".<sup>8</sup>

Finally, on May 24, 1738, John Wesley came to the conclusion that man was saved by faith alone. While it is true that his experience had been leading him to this position, it was not until that date that he was certain of this truth. It was "the day when the clear light of the gospel broke through all Wesley's subservience to rules and philosophizing. He accepted salvation like a little child".<sup>9</sup>

The actual conversion experience itself came at a Moravian service in London, which Wesley described in the following way:

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.<sup>10</sup>

This conversion should not be considered to have been a sudden break and transformation in Wesley's life, but rather a more gradual change of focus and emphasis. Wesley's life did not change radically overnight. He needed time to reorient

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<sup>8</sup>Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 60.

<sup>9</sup>Haddal, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup>Outler, p. 66.

himself. What did change drastically, however, was Wesley's religious quest. "Since his first act of self-dedication to God in 1725, he had striven to pass from faith's threshold to its fullness without a present personal assurance of God's active grace in his heart."<sup>11</sup> Aldersgate gave Wesley that assurance.

Following his conversion experience, Wesley began the new phase of his ministry that was to last until his death in 1791. His preaching of the new doctrine of free grace and personal assurance resulted in many Anglican Churches being closed to him. Wesley responded by commencing the practice of field preaching, which had been initiated by his friend and contemporary, George Whitefield. By 1742, Wesley's sphere of activities covered the entire British Isle and Wesley had begun the extensive travels which were to average eight thousand miles a year for the rest of his life. During these years, he also found time to visit Scotland and Ireland.

With the rapid growth of Methodism, Wesley was forced to organize his followers into various groups or "holy clubs" patterned after the original club at Oxford. Over each of these clubs, he appointed a lay preacher as supervisor, who normally would remain with one group for only a year or two before being transferred to another group. Wesley believed that such continual change was good for the spiritual development of his followers. This use of lay preachers, together with the practice of field preaching, more than anything else

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

brought Wesley into conflict with the Established Church, a conflict which was resolved after Wesley's death by the Methodists taking the path of separation from the Church of England.

Wesley, however, also found himself involved in many other conflicts. On the one hand he was criticized by many of his followers and other Church of England clergy who were Calvinists. These people objected to Wesley's preaching of free grace. On the other hand, Wesley was attacked by many of the Moravian Brethren for his rejection of their doctrine and practice of Quietism. It is to Wesley's credit that in the midst of this many-sided attack he was able to organize his followers on such a grand pastoral scale and develop a theological position that was both realistic and sound.

Before concluding this section, it would be helpful to look at a few of the characteristics of Wesley's personality. Perhaps one of the best descriptions of this personality is that given by Francis McConnell: "The only terms on which men could work with Wesley were his terms."<sup>12</sup> While this, to a certain extent, is a negative criticism of Wesley, one must also realize that had Wesley been very much less forceful in his attitude, his movement would probably never have started. The situation in England was such as to demand a leader with exactly this type of personality.

Also, as has been previously mentioned, Wesley remained

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<sup>12</sup>McConnell, p. 323

a slave to system throughout his entire life. Everything he did, including his thinking, had to be done systematically and orderly. He was not, however, "a brooding thinker, with ability for sustained attention upon a problem".<sup>13</sup> Rather, his thought moved toward decisions.

Francis McConnell throws a further very interesting light upon Wesley's psychological make-up. He argues that it is a mistake to think of Wesley's strain and tension as developing from a feeling of great distress and guilt over his personal transgressions. Rather, "Wesley's strain and tension came out of his mind's realization of how far away was the ideal".<sup>14</sup> Thus Wesley was drawn from "ahead and from above", rather than by a haunting sense of his past mistakes. This distinction helps to clarify what appears to have been a strange trait in Wesley's thinking. Wesley often encouraged others to make claims which he would not make for himself. For example, Wesley preached the ethic of Christian Perfection without ever claiming that he had arrived at such a state, though encouraging others to make this claim if they could honestly do so. This becomes quite understandable if one sees Wesley being drawn by an ideal "ahead and above".

When all is said and done, however, three simple little sentences written by Wesley himself throw the greatest light upon his self-understanding:

I am not careful for what may be a hundred years hence.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

He who governed the world before I was born, shall take care of it likewise when I am dead. My part is to improve the present moment.<sup>15</sup>

#### B. Theology and Ethics

John Wesley was not a systematic theologian in any sense of the term. He made no effort to construct a theological system. Rather, he was primarily interested in communicating the Gospel to the common man of his day. This interest formed the basis for all his efforts as a theologian, and really marks the theological genius of Wesley. It is not difficult for an intelligent person to speak to another intelligent person and be understood. It is difficult, however, for an intelligent person to communicate the same ideas to the common man. Wesley had a remarkable ability for doing this very thing, and because of it he was able to make Christianity a vital force in England at a time when "the common man" was emerging as a distinct class.

It would do little good to look at Wesley's theology in a purely systematic way, starting with his doctrine of God and the Creation, and finishing with his eschatology. Rather, Wesley was concerned with the situation of man in this world and the hope of his salvation. Thus, this paper will only investigate those areas of Wesley's thought that could perhaps be termed anthropological or man-centered.

To begin, Wesley understood man to be a very fallen creature indeed. He wrote:

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<sup>15</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 48.

A "Christian" cannot think of the Author of his being with abasing himself before Him, without a deep sense of the distance between a worm of earth and him that "sitteth on the circle of the heavens".<sup>16</sup>

This phrase "worm of earth" is one that Wesley used quite frequently to describe man. Unlike the Deists of his day, Wesley saw little merit in the state of natural man, referring to it as a state of sleep from which man derives a false sense of comfort and satisfaction.

(The state of natural man is) as a state of sleep. . . .And for this reason, because he is fast asleep, he is, in some sense, at rest. Because he is blind, he is also secure. . . .He is in no dread of the vengeance denounced against those who obey not the blessed law of God, because he understands it not.<sup>17</sup>

He saw all men as being atheists and idolaters, because all men think more of themselves, than they do of God.

In his natural state, every man born into the world is a rank idolater. Perhaps, indeed, we may not be such in a vulgar sense of the word. We do not, like the idolatrous Heathens, worship molten or graven images. . . .We have set up our idols in our hearts; and to these we bow down, and worship them; we worship ourselves, when we pay that honour to ourselves which is due to God only.<sup>18</sup>

Wesley also had a quite interesting concept of free will that brought him very close to Calvinism. While he admitted that man possessed a free will, he negated the implications of it by claiming that man was by nature really free only to do that which is evil. This allowed him to see faith, as well as grace, as being the completely free gift of God.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Burtner & Robert Chiles, A Compend of Wesley's Theology, (New York, 1954), p. 126.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

Wesley's only difference at this point from the Calvinists was that he saw such faith as being available to all men, not just the predestined elect. However, how his doctrine of appropriation worked has been impossible to determine. Wesley wrote:

I believe that Adam, before his fall, had such freedom of will that he might choose either good or evil; but that, since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good. . . .The will of man is by nature free only to evil.<sup>19</sup>

A statement such as this touches so closely upon predestination that it would appear to have been virtually impossible for Wesley to have denied the charge without altering one of his positions, either that of free will or that of faith.

Wesley's concept of the origin and nature of sin differed little from the basic theology of the eighteenth century. He considered evil to have entered the world with the fall of Lucifer and the subsequent temptation of Eve.<sup>20</sup> As a result of this fall, man now exists in the world in a state of suffering that can only be adequately described as punishment. Wesley considered this suffering to be cosmic in its scope.

When man, the lord of the visible creation, rebelled against God, every part of the creation began to suffer on account of his sin. And to this suffering on account of sin, I can give no proper name than that of punishment. . . .The state of all mankind did so far depend on Adam, that, by his fall,

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

they all fell into sorrow, and pain, and death, spiritual and temporal. . . . But if you ask me how sin is propagated. . . I answer plainly; I cannot tell.<sup>21</sup>

Wesley's doctrine of salvation was derived directly from his concept of sin. He made a clear distinction between the guilt of sin and the depravity or power of sin. He considered the guilt of sin to be removed in the process of justification, while the depravity was not removed until the time of sanctification.<sup>22</sup> Both of these processes, justification and sanctification, together formed man's salvation.

As with every realistic doctrine of salvation, Wesley had to avoid the extremes of antinomianism and legalism so that he might keep a balance between God's judgment and mercy. To strike this balance, he considered salvation to consist of the two general parts, justification and sanctification, both of which were primarily dependent upon faith. Wesley understood justification to consist of man being pardoned, to have all his sins forgiven, and to be accepted by God.<sup>23</sup> At the exact moment of justification, sanctification begins, but is a far more gradual process. Wesley considered sanctification to be a renewal of man in the image of God, a renewal that would result in man becoming righteous and truly holy.<sup>24</sup> Such sanctification might also be described as a gradual growth of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 273.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

grace and a gradual death to sin in the believer. Wesley believed that anyone who truly sought such sanctification would receive it, though he argued that in the vast majority of cases it was not attained until the very moment of death.<sup>25</sup> With relation to the Trinity, justification involved the action of God toward man through the Son, whereas sanctification involved the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, the basis for both these processes was considered to be faith, the human acceptance of God's free grace, the conviction and trust that "Christ loved me and gave Himself for me".<sup>27</sup> An interesting characteristic of Wesley was that he believed firmly in the doctrine of *sola fide*, but "he interpreted *solus* to mean 'primarily' rather than 'solely' or 'exclusively'."<sup>28</sup> Thus, Wesley could not be accused of antimianism. In considering the relation of faith and works, Wesley more or less emphasized good works as developing spontaneously as the result of faith and as the fruits of faith. Indeed, he believed that man was commanded by God to do good works, though not with the intent of being justified by them.

Neither doth faith shut out good works, necessary to be done afterwards of duty towards God. . . . But we do not do them to this intent, to be justified by doing them.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

Wesley further believed that faith could be lost through disobedience and failure to respond properly to God.

Along these same lines, Wesley refused to disallow any place for repentance in his doctrine of justification, though he did not consider it to be of absolute necessity if the situation did not so permit.

Both repentance and fruits meet for repentance are, in some sense, necessary to justification. But, they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree, . . . for these fruits are only necessary conditionally if there be time and opportunity for them.<sup>30</sup>

Wesley also saw a place for repentance after justification in the sense that it involved the conviction that sin still "remains", though does not "reign", in the person's heart.<sup>31</sup>

In the early days of his ministry, Wesley asserted without reservation that man could not be saved until he had assurance of the fact. This, of course, did not make Wesley popular in certain circles. In later life Wesley dropped this idea, regretting that he had been so absolute and uncompromising in this preaching. He even changed so far as to assert that "because of such sternness many souls were left in darkness, if not led into it".<sup>32</sup> Wesley further even went so far as to refuse to say that "anyone was in a state of damnation who fears God and really strives to please him".<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>32</sup> Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 177.

After looking at Wesley's doctrine of salvation, one then comes to his ethic of Christian Perfection. This was perhaps the most distinctive element in his theology, and also the most misunderstood. As has been seen above, Wesley believed that the experiences of saving faith and sanctifying faith were separated by a period of time in which the Christian grew in knowledge, love, and discipline. In other words, the initial conversion experience was only a beginning. Something more was needed before the complete state of sanctification could be arrived at. The human side of this was the ethic of Christian Perfection.

Often, Christian Perfection has been confused with sanctification, the two terms being used synonymously. To do so, however, is to completely misunderstand Wesley. Perfection for Wesley was a relative striving and not an absolute state. It was the response of man to the grace of God. On the other hand, sanctification was the work of the Holy Spirit in man following the initial experience of conversion. The goal of both was to bring man to the absolute state of complete sanctification. The misunderstanding of Wesley comes in referring to this state of complete sanctification as a state of complete perfection, and then confusing this use of the term "perfection" with the ethic of Christian Perfection. Such confusion has caused tremendous difficulty in grasping the essence of Wesley's thought.

Perhaps the best definition of the Wesleyan ethic is that "Christian Perfection is loving God with all one's heart,

mind, soul, and strength".<sup>34</sup> Thus the ethic of Christian Perfection is essentially an ethic of love. It is best interpreted as an ethic of perfection in the sense of "fixity of direction" rather than of an "arrived at state".<sup>35</sup>

For Wesley, it followed logically that if he preached the ethic of Christian Perfection he would also have to preach complete sanctification (or complete perfection) as an attainable experience within the span of human life. Wesley himself never made the claim that he had arrived at such a state,<sup>36</sup> but he would not deny that perhaps others had. This led to much difficulty, for "just as there were those who denounced Wesley's offer of 'perfection' in this life as 'enthusiasm', so also there were enthusiasts whose personal professions of 'entire sanctification' so disturbed Wesley that he felt compelled to redress the balance from the other side.<sup>37</sup> Wesley warned these believers to make certain that it was not just their enthusiasm that was causing them to make such claims.

He gave them the following advice:

Beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm. . . .  
Do not ascribe to God what is not of God. . . . Try  
all things by the written Word and let all bow down  
before it. You are in danger of enthusiasm every  
hour if you depart ever so little from Scripture.  
. . . One general inlet to enthusiasm is the expecting

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>35</sup> Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939),  
p. 199.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>37</sup> Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 299.

the end without the means - the expecting knowledge, for instance, without searching the Scripture, the expecting spiritual strength without constant prayer.<sup>38</sup>

In this sense Wesley was not an "enthusiast", for he saw it as being a continual danger in keeping man from coming to grips with reality. This was the basis for his controversy with the Moravians over Quietism, which will be considered later in this chapter.

Before leaving this section on Wesley's ethics, one should at least note that Wesley was not a radical social reformer, but was rather chiefly concerned with personal, individualistic morality. He did, however, speak out on certain key issues such as slavery, and no doubt his overall views were far better than those of the majority of his contemporaries. Wesley's great influence in the area of social reform was basically twofold. First, he simply took account of the emerging masses of people and gave them a feeling of importance and class - consciousness at a time when both were desperately needed. And second, he helped to arouse the British mind to the many possible wrongs that were coming into existence under the new social order.<sup>39</sup>

### C. Doctrine of the Church and Ministry

More controversy has surrounded Wesley's doctrine of the Church and Ministry than any other phase of his life and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.; p. 300.

<sup>39</sup> Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 232.

thought. For this reason, a statement made by Wesley in 1788, only three years before his death and four years after the first of his ordinations, should be carefully noted.

Next after the primitive church, I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national church in the world. I therefore not only assented to all the doctrines, but observed all the rubrics in the Liturgy; and that with all possible exactness, even at the peril of my life... I declare once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England; and that none who regard my judgment will ever separate from it.<sup>40</sup>

It is of great interest and importance to try to determine what Wesley meant by this statement.

Before his conversion experience, Wesley was a high churchman. After 1738, churchmanship began to take a more subordinate role in his thinking, though it at no time became unimportant. What resulted from the experience was that Wesley took up two irregularities of practice, unauthorized field preaching and the use of lay preachers. While neither of these two practices was completely without precedent in either the Church of England or the primitive church, they did stretch eighteenth century Anglican churchmanship a bit.

Rather than believing the church to be any sort of end in itself, Wesley understood it in an instrumental sense. While not denying the sacred nature of the church and its ordinances, Wesley preferred to view them as means rather than ends.<sup>41</sup> This led Wesley to the distinctive accent that

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<sup>40</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 187.

<sup>41</sup>Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 173.

"the church is best defined in action in her witness and mission, rather than by her form of polity".<sup>42</sup> By replacing the traditional static view of the church with this dynamic interpretation, Wesley was able to move outside of the formal structure of the church while still considering himself to be a good churchman. When asked what he considered the church to be, he replied:

The catholic or universal church is all the persons in the universe whom God hath so called out of the world as to entitle them to the preceding character - as to be one body, united by one Spirit, having one faith, one hope, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all.<sup>43</sup>

At another time, when accused of undermining the church, Wesley defined the three things constituting the church as being living faith, preaching and hearing, and a due administration of the sacraments.<sup>44</sup> He denied that he was undermining any one of these.

With regard to church polity, Wesley preferred the three fold orders of the Anglican ministry, though he did not believe that the divine right of the episcopacy was prescribed in the primitive church. This had not always been his feeling, however. As late as 1745, Wesley still held to the "Anglican principle of a threefold ministry and the necessity for episcopal ordination for valid sacraments, the true episcopacy involving a succession from the Apostles through the Roman

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<sup>42</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 307.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

bishops".<sup>45</sup> What changed Wesley's mind in this matter, and subsequently formed the basis for his ordinations nearly forty years later, was a book he read in 1746, An Account of the Primitive Church by Peter King.<sup>46</sup> This book argued that in the primitive church bishops and presbyters were essentially of the same order and thus had essentially the same basic rights. It claimed that the only way to truly understand the role of the threefold ministry was to think of the bishops as being equivalent to rectors in the Church of England, priests as equivalent to vicars, and deacons as equivalent to deacons.<sup>47</sup> Thus, presbyters were under bishops, but had the same inherent rights.

Before going on to an analysis of Wesley's concept of the ministry and the problem of his ordinations, it will be helpful to first glance at a few of his thoughts concerning Christian worship. In the first place, with regard to communion, Wesley's intention was that his followers should depend upon the Established Church, not only for the Sacraments but also for all its other offices. Indeed, the Methodist services were intended to be purely supplemental to those of the Church of England. Wesley suggested that Methodists commune regularly in Anglican Churches as he himself did, and

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<sup>45</sup>A. B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry, (London, 1963), p. 45.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

insisted that Methodist services be so arranged as not to conflict with Anglican services. This practice was not always possible, however, for often there were either no Anglican Churches in the area or else the Anglican clergy were hostile to Methodism.

It was this same hostility of Anglican clergymen that contributed to Wesley's taking up the practice of field preaching. Wesley was a preacher of free grace and could be quite offensive in his sermons. Together, these contributed to the closing to him of one parish door after another. But this alone would probably not have forced Wesley into the practice of field preaching had not George Whitefield broken the path for him. In 1739, before he had taken up the practice himself, he recalled his initial reaction to Whitefield's radical new departure.

I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this very strange way of preaching in the fields... Having been all my life so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin had it not been done in a church.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, however, on April 2, 1739 Wesley gave in, recording the event in the following way:

At four in the afternoon I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining the city (of Bristol) to about

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<sup>48</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 148.

three thousand people.<sup>49</sup>

It is doubtful if Wesley, with his sense of good order, would have taken up the practice had he not been able to find some proper basis for such preaching outside of parish and diocesan boundaries. He found this basis in the fact that he had been ordained as a Fellow of Lincoln College, and was therefore not limited to any particular cure. He argued this position before Bishop Butler in the following way:

I am a priest of the Church universal, and being ordained as a Fellow of a College, I was not limited to any particular cure, but have an indeterminate commission to preach the Word of God in any part of the Church of England.<sup>50</sup>

After Wesley had begun field preaching, he saw its values as being too great to discard on the grounds of irregularity. He faced the reality of this fact solidly, as indicated by the following statement:

God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish; that is, in effect, (to forbid me) to do it at all, seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom, then, shall I hear, God or man? . . . Suffer me now to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish - thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear me the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to, and sure I am that his blessing attends it.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the best way to describe the liturgical form

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>50</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 349.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

which Wesley devised for Methodist worship is to call it a combination of liturgical form and free prayer. Wesley originally constructed the liturgical form so as to keep the Methodists dependent upon the Church of England, and when the time came for him to prepare a liturgy for the American Methodists, he constructed one that differed little from that of the Established Church.<sup>52</sup> Besides free prayer, the only other novel practices which Wesley introduced into his societies were the Moravian ordinances of the Agape meal and the Watch-night service.<sup>53</sup>

Wesley understood worship to be simply one of the important means of expressing and communicating the principles of the Christian religion. It was this religion which Wesley saw as being far more important than any form of worship. He wrote:

I take religion to be not the bare saying over of so many prayers, . . . but a constant ruling habit of soul, a renewal of our minds in the image of God, a recovery of the divine likeness, a still-increasing conformity of heart and life to the pattern of our most holy redeemer.<sup>54</sup>

Wesley believed that such religion could best be maintained through participation of the believers in societies, the first of which were organized in 1740 at Moorfields and Bristol.<sup>55</sup> These Methodist Societies were organized on the

<sup>52</sup>A. B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry, (London, 1963), p. 45.

<sup>53</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 191.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>55</sup>Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 74.

basis of providing pastoral care for the members, each society having a lay-preacher as its head. The sole basis for admission into a society was simply that a person be a believer in Jesus Christ and live a life worthy of this belief. Wesley defined the societies in the following way:

A society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.<sup>56</sup>

Thus we come to the issue of Wesley's use of lay-preachers, a practice which caused him to be severely censured by the church authorities of his day. Wesley placed these preachers in charge of his various societies when the number of these societies became too great for him to administer himself. These preachers were not ordained, and for the most part were ignorant men. Their preaching, unlike the learned discourses of the ordained clergy, was mainly in the form of witnessing to various experiences. Although Wesley argued that he had a precedent for the practice both in the primitive church and in the church under Elizabeth, it was irregular for two reasons. First, the practice of using lay preachers had lapsed. Second, Wesley had not received episcopal sanction to reinstitute it.<sup>57</sup> Wesley, however, believed that his preachers were accomplishing what the

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<sup>56</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 178.

<sup>57</sup>A. B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry, (London, 1963), p. 28.

Church of England clergy were unable to do, and therefore he refused to put a stop to the practice. For Wesley, the proof which determined whether or not a ministry was valid was not apostolic succession, but whether or not a person was "turning many to righteousness".<sup>58</sup> He felt his preachers were doing this.

One seemingly comic remark really gets at the heart of Wesley's thinking in this matter. When he was asked in what century had any Christian taken upon himself the office of preaching without episcopal ordination, he replied:

After the persecution of Stephen in the very first century, as you may read in the eighth chapter of the Acts. But I must likewise ask you, in what century did any drunkard take that office upon himself, either with or without Episcopal ordination? . . . A lay preacher is surely to be preferred to a drunken, cursing, swearing preacher.<sup>59</sup>

Wesley further concluded that if matters came to a head, ordination would have to give way to the work he saw at hand.

He wrote:

If we cannot stop a separation without stopping lay preachers, the case is clear - we cannot stop it at all.<sup>60</sup>

Wesley did not deny the value of ordination for the proper administration of the Sacraments, and he refused to allow his lay preachers to function in this manner. But Wesley also saw the results that his lay preachers were

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58 Ibid., p. 82.

59 Ibid., p. 101.

60 Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 76.

producing, and he refused to place this preaching in a position of inferiority to the administration of the sacraments. He believed that ordination meant simply authority to function sacramentally, and therefore concluded that ordination was not necessary for his lay preachers.<sup>61</sup> Like his doctrine of the church, Wesley believed that ordination had value only as it was able to function dynamically, and that it therefore had no intrinsic static value. To this end, he wrote:

What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in His fear and love? Order then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends.<sup>62</sup>

It was the growth of Methodism in America that finally forced Wesley to take the step of ordaining men for work in the Methodist Societies. This was a step Wesley did not want to take unless it be absolutely necessary. As late as 1780 he wrote:

I verily believe I have as good a right to ordain as to administer the Lord's Supper. But I see abundance of reasons why I should not use that right, unless I was turned out of the Church.<sup>63</sup>

Then, after ordaining Coke as superintendent for America, Wesley wrote:

Lord King's account of the primitive church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>A. B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry, (London, 1963), p. 108.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

Upon comparing these two statements one sees that nothing had changed in Wesley's thought except for the fact that ordination had taken place.

It should be emphasized that Wesley had no intention of ordaining anyone to the office of bishop. His ordination of Coke was merely a delegation of Coke as his personal representative in America and an authorization for Coke, as an elder, to administer the sacraments. Upon arriving in America, however, Coke ordained Francis Asbury also to the office of superintendent, after which both men began to call themselves bishops. This appalled Wesley, and in a letter to Asbury, written in 1788, he stated:

How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called a Bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave, a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never by my consent call me a Bishop. For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, put a full end to this!<sup>65</sup>

Finally, as a last phase of this process, in 1788 Wesley was forced also to ordain preachers for work in England. Pressure from within the societies and non-cooperation from the clergy of the Established Church made this final step necessary.

#### D. Opposition and Controversy

As with any new departure from an established order, Wesley's actions forced him into many controversies. Not only did Wesley have to face opposition from the Church of England clergy, but he also was almost invariably thrown

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

into conflict with many of his old friends and colleagues, particularly the Moravians and the Calvinist Methodists. Such conflict was the result of Wesley's desire to keep his theology from falling into the various distortions that were characteristic of these other systems.

To begin with, Wesley considered his movement to be an evangelical order within the Established Church, and always thought of himself as a loyal son of that church. He earnestly believed that the Methodist Revival was firmly grounded in Anglican tradition, and "because of its service to true religion, it deserved at least the sufferance, if not the active support, of all truly earnest Christians".<sup>66</sup> Wesley, however, was criticized by two different factions in the church for quite different reasons. The Anglican Evangelicals, being Calvinists, criticized him because he preached free grace rather than predestination. The High-Churchmen criticized him because he was creating an organization that was increasingly becoming a competitor to the establishment.<sup>67</sup> They no doubt saw this as inevitably leading to dissent and separation. Nor did these churchmen care for Wesley's emphasis on assurance, which they considered to be evidence of his uninhibited enthusiasm. No doubt they were further offended by the positiveness with which Wesley preached this doctrine of assurance.

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<sup>66</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 385.

<sup>67</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 174.

It is not surprising that Wesley's preaching did upset the church leaders of his day. The eighteenth century was the so-called "Age of Reason", and while Wesley did not deny the value of reason, he did preach an experience that was over and above reason. As Horton Davies has pointed out, "The assertion that the Holy Spirit is the agent in conversion was regarded in those days not as a commonplace of theology but as an affront to reason, and to claim the work of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of Anglican ministers who were invading other men's parishes was regarded by critics as tantamount to blasphemous presumption."<sup>68</sup>

The opposition to Wesley took the basic form of simply not asking him to preach in any Anglican Churches. If one would examine Wesley's Journal, he would find that from the time of Wesley's return to England on, one church door after another was slammed shut before him. Wesley's account of an incident with the Rector of Epworth, his father's old parish, illustrates the general nature of this opposition, which for about the first twenty years of Methodism nearly amounted to persecution. Wesley commented:

A Clergyman so drunk he can scarcely stand or speak, may, in the presence of a thousand people, set upon another clergyman of the same church, both with abusive words and open violence. And what follows? Why, the one is still allowed to dispense the sacred signs of the body and blood of Christ. But the other is not allowed to receive them - because he is a field-preacher.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>69</sup>A. B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry (London, 1963), p. 24.

After about 1860, however, Methodism had become so established that such violent opposition for the most part ceased, and the Evangelical Movement in the Church of England began to pick up more force.<sup>70</sup>

The sad fact of the situation was, however, that the machinery had been set into motion that was to result in the Methodist drift into separatism. While Wesley himself was against separation, many of his followers strongly objected to having any connection whatsoever to the establishment. Thus the remark has been made that schism was prevented during Wesley's lifetime only because "reverence for Wesley obscured the fact that he was the staunchly conformist leader of a nonconformist movement".<sup>71</sup> Finally, Francis McConnell's comment probably has a great deal of truth to it. "One of the profoundest tributes ever paid the Church of England was Wesley's stand against the Methodists' leaving it."<sup>72</sup>

As has been noted before, Wesley's conflicts were not entirely with the Church of England. He also had a great controversy with the Moravians over their preaching of Quietism, which was the practice of waiting for the Holy Spirit to fall upon a person without that person doing any type of Bible reading, private meditation, or worship. The Quietists claimed that a weak faith was the same as no faith, and that

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<sup>70</sup>Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 439.

<sup>71</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 126.

<sup>72</sup>Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 188.

until a person had true faith he should abstain from any and all "means of grace".<sup>73</sup> To Wesley, this was nothing more than spiritual complacency. He argued:

I believe (that) there are degrees in faith and that a man may have some degree of it before all things in him are become new - before he has the full assurance of faith, the abiding witness of the Spirit, or the clear perception that Christ dwelleth in him. ... Therefore I believe it right for him who knows he has not that conquering faith to go to church, to communicate, to fast, to use private prayer, to read the Scripture, ... and to endeavor after doing spiritual good ... because I believe these are 'means of grace', that is, they do ordinarily convey God's grace to unbelievers.<sup>74</sup>

What was really at the heart of Wesley's opposition to Quietism was his genuine dislike of antinomianism and its ensuing ethic that allowed a believer to be passive. He once wrote:

Beware of Moravianism - the most refined antinomianism that ever was under the sun, and such as I think could only have sprung from the abuse of true Christian experience.<sup>75</sup>

One must remember that for Wesley the ethic of Christian Perfection was not so much a static state as a dynamic aim or purpose resulting from faith, whereas the Quietists claimed that a man could have no faith, and thus should do absolutely nothing, until he became absolutely perfect as God is perfect. Thus for Wesley Quietism was completely unacceptable.

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<sup>73</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 354.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

Finally, Wesley's other great controversy was with the Calvinists over the matter of free grace vs. predestination. Wesley was very close to the Calvinists in many respects, and thus was not at odds with them over their entire theological system. Like the Calvinists, Wesley had a strong doctrine of the sovereignty of God, but unlike them, he also stressed God's justice, which for him included truth, mercy, and love.<sup>76</sup> He refused to allow the sovereignty to supersede this justice. Wesley also understood election as being valid in two ways. First, it was valid in the sense of a divine appointment by God of some particular men to do some particular work in the world. Second, it was valid as a divine appointment of some men to eternal happiness, but only conditionally, only as a result of faith.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, Wesley did not mind calling the justified "elect".

What Wesley did oppose, however, was the doctrine of unconditional election or predestination. He wrote:

We think it our duty to oppose predestination with our whole strength, not as an opinion, but as a dangerous mistake which appears to be subversive of the very foundations of Christian experience and which has, in fact, given occasion to the most grievous offenses.<sup>78</sup>

Wesley could simply not understand how God could be just and still punish and reward men unconditionally. To this end, he wrote:

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<sup>76</sup>Albert Outler, John Wesley, (New York, 1964), p. 439.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

Shall a stone be rewarded for rising from the sling, or punished for falling down? Shall the cannon ball be rewarded for flying towards the sun, or punished for receding from it? As incapable of either punishment or reward is the man who is supposed to be impelled by a force he cannot resist.<sup>79</sup>

In the end, however, the controversy boiled down to two great areas of disagreement. The Calvinists saw God's sovereignty in terms of his freedom from the world, Wesley saw it in terms of his victorious involvement in it. The Calvinists saw salvation threatened by free will, Wesley saw God's character deformed by the doctrine of reprobation.<sup>80</sup> However, even with this conflict, Wesley was realistic enough to be able to look at the work of such Calvinist preachers as George Whitefield and make the statement:

I am confident that Whitefield's preaching wins lives to God in spite of the Calvinism.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 426.

<sup>81</sup>Francis McConnell, John Wesley, (New York, 1939), p. 147.

### III. FROM WESLEY TO SIMEON

Before beginning the study of Charles Simeon as the representative Church of England evangelical of the generation following Wesley, certain attention should be given to the development of evangelicalism within the Anglican Church. Much misunderstanding exists along this line.

It has become common to assume that the Anglican Evangelicals were nothing more than a small group of Methodists who chose to remain within the formal Church of England structure. This was not the situation, however. Anglican Evangelicalism was a distinct movement and deserves to be treated in its own right. Indeed, in the generation following Wesley it was the only movement which had remained true to the basis of the original thrust made by Wesley.

To understand this situation, it is important to realize that there were basically three types of evangelicals functioning within the Church of England in the eighteenth century: Wesleyan Methodists, Whitefieldian or Calvinist Methodists, and the Anglican Evangelicals. By Simeon's time the first two of these groups had openly left the Church of England structure. The purpose of this chapter is simply to point out briefly how this situation came about.

Enough had been said in the previous chapter to indicate the direction in which Wesleyan Methodism was going in

the latter years of Wesley's life. It was noted there that the only factor which hindered the drift into separation was the personal influence of John Wesley himself. Following Wesley's death in 1791, however, schism was inevitable. It took only four years for the Methodists to become openly non-conformist.<sup>82</sup>

The situation was somewhat different with regard to the Whitefieldian or Calvinist Methodists. George Whitefield had played a vital role in the early organization of Methodism, and indeed was the person who had initially persuaded John Wesley to undertake the practice of field preaching. In 1740, however, a serious rift began to take place within Methodism. This rift was the result of a conflict between Whitefield's Calvinism and Wesley's concept of free grace. At first this was just a minor dispute, but soon various sermons and articles by both Wesley and Whitefield were published without the knowledge or permission of either man. These publications reached a large audience, and served the purpose of adding additional fuel to the fire. It was not long before the whole conflict got out of hand.

The fact that Whitefield was just as stubborn and headstrong as Wesley did not help to resolve this difference of opinions. Once the flames had been ignited, neither man was willing to recognize any value in the other's position. Whitefield had spent his boyhood in a tavern, and after his

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<sup>82</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 210.

conversion experience he was convinced that it was only by the unconditional election of God that he had been drawn out of such a sinful existence. This thinking was no doubt reinforced by the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards, whom he had met on one of his trips to America. Whitefield was very impressed by the work of this outstanding New England theologian.

Thus, he refused to back down on his Calvinistic stance, just as Wesley refused to modify his doctrine of free grace.

Finally, in March, 1741, both men agreed to go their separate ways, though they remained on friendly terms with one another.<sup>83</sup>

As a result the conflict died down somewhat, only to be renewed much more openly and bitterly upon Whitefield's death in 1770.

It is somewhat doubtful that this rift would have occurred had not the two factions within Methodism forced the issue and made it impossible for either leader to arrive at a solution without losing face. Wesley and Whitefield had the highest regard for one another, and probably could have kept the matter down to the minor dispute it had started out to be. For example, when one of Whitefield's Calvinist friends asked him whether he thought they might see John Wesley in heaven, Whitefield replied:

I fear not, he will be so near to the throne, and we shall be at such a distance, that we shall hardly get a sight of him.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>A. Skevington Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze, (London, 1960), p. 186.

<sup>84</sup>Stuart C. Henry, George Whitefield, Wayfaring Witness, (New York, 1957), p. 80.

But be this as it may, after 1741 Methodism was divided into two distinct groups.

At first, it seemed as though the Whitefieldian Methodists would be able to stay within the Church of England. Whitefield made no attempt to inaugurate a separate organization for his converts, and his Calvinism was certainly compatible with the thirty-nine articles. Also, whereas Wesley was under attack by both the High Churchmen and Evangelicals, Whitefield was criticized only by the High Churchmen. It was not until the decade after Whitefield's death that the situation began to disintegrate.

The split came about in 1782, when the Church of England refused to license a chapel for the Countess of Huntingdon, who had been Whitefield's benefactress and thus was one of the leaders of the Calvinist Methodist movement. The Countess reacted by registering it as a Dissenting Chapel under the Toleration Act, following which her entire Church of England clerical staff resigned. The Whitefieldian Methodists thus became open dissenters, and in due time were gradually absorbed into Congregationalism.<sup>85</sup>

Following this movement of both Methodist groups into separatism, the Anglican Evangelicals were left as the sole proponents of evangelicalism within the Church of England. As has been mentioned before, these men were part of a distinct movement and were not merely Methodists who chose to

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<sup>85</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), p. 212.

remain within the Established Church structure. The Evangelicals were not organized on a national scale. Rather they were simply individuals preaching evangelical doctrine within parish bounds. For the most part they refused to undertake an itinerant ministry, instead seeking revival within the formal church structure. "Whereas the Methodists made the world thier parish, the Evangelicals tended to make the parish their world."<sup>86</sup> The Evangelicals were basically Calvinist in their theology. Further, they should not be equated with the Low Churchmen, who were Latitudinarians.

Horton Davies has identified five basic traits that distinguished the Anglican Evangelicals from the Methodists.<sup>87</sup> These distinctions are made basically with the Wesleyan Methodists in mind. First, the Anglican Evangelicals were more clerical than the Methodists. That is, they were suspicious of putting too much power in the hands of the laity. Second, for the most part they resented the intrusion of itinerant preachers into the parish boundaries. Third, they were suspicious of the doctrine of Christian Perfection, preferring a moderate Calvinism to Arminianism. Fourth, whereas Wesley studied the Church Fathers for theology, the Anglican Evangelicals studied the Puritan writers. Fifth, and most important of all, was the distinguishing mark of stricter churchmanship. The Anglican Evangelicals were willing to function under Episcopal authority.

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<sup>86</sup>A. Skevington Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze, (London, 1960), p. 133.

<sup>87</sup>Horton Davies, Worship and Theology in England 1690-1850, (Princeton, 1961), pp. 215-216.

The roots of Anglican Evangelicalism can be traced well back into the early part of the eighteenth century. For example, George Thomson, Vicar of St. Genny's in Cornwall, had a conversion experience either in 1732 or 1733 which caused him immediately to begin expounding evangelical doctrine from his pulpit. Here it should be recalled that John Wesley's conversion did not occur until 1738.

Perhaps the most interesting of the early Anglican Evangelicals was William Grimshaw of Yorkshire, who in his early days was a pleasure loving, card playing, drinking clergyman. In 1734, however, he gave up these practices and began praying four times daily. Then in 1742 he experienced a final conversion, immediately after which he was placed at St. Michael's, Haworth. Grimshaw differed from other Evangelicals in that he did itinerate in much of West Yorkshire. He had two organized circuits which he rode alternately, and which caused many hard feelings among neighboring clergymen. Fortunately for Grimshaw, his bishop usually refused to censure him.

Another notable figure was Samuel Walker of Truro, who had attended Exeter College, Oxford, at the time when Wesley and Whitefield were both at the University. Walker's conversion experience came in 1746. Rather than itinerate, Walker organized a clerical club in 1750 through which he helped to extend the revival to his surrounding area. What is interesting about Samuel Walker was that "John Wesley recognized in Walker the solitary exception to his somewhat arbitrary and indefensible rule that the regular clergyman could not possibly

exercise a fruitful ministry".<sup>88</sup>

As Anglican Evangelicalism continued to develop, it became the accepted attitude that a clergyman should not overstep his parish boundaries. Indeed, a new emphasis began to be placed on spending many years within one particular parish. This attitude became particularly prominent among some of the later clergy of the eighteenth century. For example, John Newton came to London in 1779, and stayed for 28 years at St. Mary's, Woolnoth. Henry Venn arrived at Huddersfield in 1759, and stayed until 1771, at which time poor health forced him to retire from such an active life. He then moved to Yelling, twelve miles west of Cambridge, where he remained for 26 years until his death in 1797.

Such was the basic development of Anglican Evangelicalism up to the time of Charles Simeon. Simeon, of course, represents the fullness of this development in that he spent 54 years as Pastor of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge.

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<sup>88</sup>A. Skevington Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze, (London, 1960), p. 138.

#### IV. CHARLES SIMEON

##### A. The Man

Charles Simeon was born at Reading in 1759, the youngest child in a family of four boys. Simeon's mother died while he was still very young, and thus he was raised by his father with little feminine influence in his life. In 1768, he began his preparatory education at Eton, where he gained the reputation of being a lover of fine dress and athletics. He remained at Eton through 1778, at which time he received a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge.

Upon arriving at Cambridge in January, 1779, Simeon found a rather poor town of about 10,000 people. Methodism had never really touched the town, John Wesley only once having passed through on October 11, 1763.<sup>89</sup> Discipline, letters, and morality at the University were all at a very low ebb. Religious life in any social sense was virtually unknown. Thus it becomes somewhat amazing that against this background Simeon was soon to have a profound and deep religious experience.

When he arrived at the University, Simeon was informed that he would have to attend a Communion Service. This information set into motion a process of deep introspection and self-examination that was to result in a conversion experience.

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<sup>89</sup>H.C.G. Moule, Charles Simeon, (London, 1892), p. 21.

Simeon commented on this period of his life in a recollection written in 1813.

It was on the third day after my arrival that I understood I should be expected in the space of about three weeks to attend the Lord's Supper. 'What', said I, 'must I attend?' On being informed that I must, the thought rushed into my mind that Satan himself was as fit to attend as I; and that if I must attend, I must prepare for my attendance there.<sup>90</sup>

Simeon then began a study of the theology of Holy Communion. After three months this brought him to the truth he was seeking.

But in Passion Week, as I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect - 'That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering'. The thought came into my mind 'What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my soul one moment longer.' Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter day, April 4, 1789, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, 'Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul; and at the Lord's table in our chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior.<sup>91</sup>

Immediately following this experience Simeon began to make some attempts at witnessing, such as instructing his bed-maker and her friends on Sunday nights in the principles of Christianity. But by and large he spent the next three years in virtual seclusion. It was not until he met John Venn in

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

1782 that a more outward expression of his faith began. At this point it is nearly impossible to over-estimate the influence upon Charles Simeon of Henry Venn, Rector of Yelling (twelve miles west of Cambridge) and father of John Venn.

Simeon began visiting Yelling that summer and continued to do so until Henry Venn's death. It was Henry Venn more than any other person who helped to mould Simeon into the Church leader he was to become.

In 1782 Simeon was also ordained Deacon and appointed Honorary Curate by Christopher Atkinson of St. Edward's Church. It was here that Simeon's potential became manifest. As Henry Venn noted in his journal

In less than 17 Sundays, by preaching for Mr. Atkinson in a church at Cambridge, he (Simeon) filled it with hearers - a thing unknown there for near a century.<sup>92</sup>

Then, in October, 1782, Simeon was appointed by Bishop Yorke Curate-in-charge of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge.

Simeon's appointment to Holy Trinity was stormy to say the least. The parishioners had wanted the Bishop to appoint their Assistant Curate, a Mr. Hammond, as Minister. To put pressure on Bishop Yorke, they elected Hammond Lecturer, feeling that the living without the lecturership would not be worthy of anyone's acceptance, since the Curate-in-charge had also always been the Lecturer. Learning this, Simeon offered to decline the appointment, but was informed by Bishop Yorke that Hammond would never be appointed anyway. On the basis of this knowledge Simeon accepted.

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

The first ten years of Simeon's ministry were difficult almost beyond comprehension. All of the pews in the church were locked and vacated, Simeon's listeners being forced to stand in the aisles or outside the open windows. When he tried to put up seats at his own expense in the aisles and corners of the church, the Church Wardens reacted by throwing them out into the courtyard. When Simeon began a very popular evening service at 6:00 P.M., the Wardens locked the doors to the church, forcing Simeon to cancel the service in order to avoid creating further trouble. As might be expected, the novelty of locked pews and dissension also attracted many undergraduates from the University, most of whom came for the sole purpose of insulting and disturbing the worshippers.

Within approximately a decade, however, the controversy began to abate. Simeon's gentleness in meeting the opposition began to make a deep impression upon the people and win their good will, as did his efforts during the famine of 1788, when he took it upon himself to provide bread for the poor in Cambridge and the surrounding villages. Perhaps the turning point came in 1794, when the Lectureship was given to Simeon. Pews began to be unlocked, though it was still to be many years before the entire church was open for public worship.

The only further period of serious opposition to Simeon occurred following Bishop Yorke's death in 1808. The new prelate, Bishop Dampier, was suspicious of the evangelical revival and thus attempted to interfere in the work at Holy Trinity Church. Simeon, in his typical fashion, did his best to function

under this situation and attempted to maintain some respect for episcopal authority, though at times this became quite difficult. What is significant was that by this time Simeon had sufficient support from the parish to limit Bishop Dampier's efforts. Thus the situation of a bishop defending a clergyman against a hostile congregation became reversed to one of a congregation defending that same clergyman against a hostile bishop.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when all hostilities ceased within the parish. It is certain that they were over at the time of Simeon's death in 1836. Indeed, in 1832, the fiftieth anniversary of Simeon's coming to Trinity, the parish had a huge celebration and gave their minister many gifts.<sup>93</sup> This man who had originally faced such drastic opposition had become one of the most loved citizens of Cambridge.

It is interesting how good can often result from what at face value appears to be an entirely evil situation. For example, Simeon's great work in the area of preaching was a direct result of the efforts made at Trinity to keep him from preaching. At Trinity Simeon was only able to hold a Sunday morning service. As previously mentioned, his Sunday evening service had been cancelled, and he didn't dare try to establish weekday services. Thus he found himself with a great deal of time on his hands during the week. To occupy this time, Simeon began preaching on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights at neighboring village churches, using the same sermon that he

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

had preached the previous Sunday at Trinity. This practice gave him the opportunity to experiment with and try to improve his technique, and he became a student of the art of preaching. This study eventually led to the publication of his *HORAE HOMILETICAE*, a twenty-one volume collection of sermon outlines covering the entire Bible, completed in 1833.

In addition to his work at Trinity and his work on the *HORAE HOMILETICAE*, Simeon had two other areas of great interest. These will be only mentioned in passing at this point as they are covered in greater detail at the end of this chapter. First, Simeon was greatly involved in the missionary outreach of the Church. He was an influential figure in the founding and support of many societies devoted to this mission purpose. Second, Simeon carried on a very important ministry at Cambridge University. Here he was particularly concerned with the quality of the education of men preparing to enter the ministry.

In concluding this brief sketch of Charles Simeon, mention should be given to one practice that he followed faithfully his entire life. He arose at four every morning so that he might have four hours of Bible study and prayer before beginning his day at eight. In order to acquire this habit, Simeon resolved to give a half-crown to his servant every time he failed to do so. "One morning, as he lay warm and comfortable, he caught himself reasoning that the good woman was poor and that the half-crown would be very useful to her. But that practical fallacy was not to be tolerated; if he arose late again, he would walk down to the Cam and throw a guinea into

the water.<sup>94</sup> It is to Simeon's credit that only once did he have to resort to this action.

#### B. Theology and Ethics

In any discussion of Simeon's theology, one must begin with Simeon's understanding and use of Scripture, for this indeed is the key to his thinking.

Unlike most of his predecessors and contemporaries, Simeon was distinctively a Biblical theologian, and as such he had little use for the systematic theologians.

God has not revealed his truth in a system: The Bible has no system as such. Lay aside system and fly to the Bible; receive its words with simple submission, and without an eye to any system. Be Bible Christians, and not system Christians.<sup>95</sup>

This emphasis can be seen in two important areas of Simeon's life. First, Simeon's great literary endeavor took the form of a homiletical commentary on Scripture. Second, Simeon chose not to get involved in the Calvinist-Arminian controversy of his day, since both sides were arguing more on the basis of system than they were on Scripture. (Further attention will be given to this particular issue later in the chapter.) Simeon spelled his position out in the preface to the *HORAE HOMILETICAE*.

The Author is no friend to systematizers in theology. He has endeavored to derive from the Scriptures alone his views of religion, and to them it is his wish to adhere with scrupulous fidelity.... He has no doubt but that there is a system in the Holy Scriptures (for truth cannot be inconsistent with itself); but he is persuaded that neither Calvinists nor Arminians are in exclusive possession of that system. He is

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>95</sup> Robert S. Dell, "Simeon and the Bible, in *Charles Simeon, 1759-1836*, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Michael Hennell (London, 1959), p. 34.

disposed to think that the Scripture system, be it what it may, is of a broader and more comprehensive character than some very exact and dogmatic theologians are inclined to allow; and that, as wheels in a complicated machine may move in opposite directions and yet subserve one common end, so may truths apparently opposite be perfectly reconcilable with each other, and equally subserve the purposes of God in the accomplishment of man's salvation.<sup>96</sup>

Simeon's exegetical method was very straightforward and clear; he attempted to allow Scripture to speak for itself without reading into it. Even by today's standards this was a highly commendable and desirable practice. Simeon summed up his method as follows

My mode of interpreting Scripture is this. I bring to it no predilections whatever: for though I have in my mind the analogy of faith, and am aware that no portion of the Scripture, rightly interpreted, can contradict that, yet I never wish to find any particular truth in any particular passage. I am willing that every part of God's blessed word should speak exactly what it was intended to speak.<sup>97</sup>

Simeon did not deny that there were difficulties involved in handling the various "apparently contradictory" passages found in Scripture, but he insisted that they be treated without distorting the truth of one passage or another. His concept was that such passages provided a sort of dynamic balance between various extremes.

The way to solve the difficulties of Scripture is to give every declaration of God its proper force, and then to mark the subserviency of one truth to others which appear opposed to it.... There is no real opposition between one part and another, but every

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<sup>96</sup> William Carus, Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon (New York, 1847), p. 309.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

truth has its proper place in the system, and its proper use. If one encourages, another humbles; if one inspires confidence, another stimulates to activity.<sup>98</sup>

Simeon's Biblical theology led him directly to his concept of man. He saw very little value in the state of natural or rational man, whom he considered to be too proud for his own spiritual good.

Proud man is fond of human wisdom; the Bible Christian is a fool. The one is wise and becomes a fool: the other is content to become a fool so that he may be wise.<sup>99</sup>

Simeon considered such a person to be definitely at a disadvantage to the spiritual man, even with respect to what might be called simple, rational knowledge.

He (natural man) looks through a dense medium of sense which distorts, or altogether conceals, the objects before him; and he wants that peculiar glass of faith, which would present them truly, and bring them, if I may say so, directly upon the retina of his mind.<sup>100</sup>

As would be expected, the basis for Simeon's doctrine of man was his doctrine of the fall and original sin. In this respect Simeon was simply being consistent with the other evangelical thinkers of his day. He wrote

Man, at his first creation, was made in the divine image; God communed with him as a friend, and dwelt in him as a temple; but this harmony was not of long continuance; man sinned; and God in righteous judgement departed from him.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Charles Simeon, Let Wisdom Judge - University Addresses and Sermon Outlines (Chicago, 1959), p. 35.

<sup>99</sup> Dell, p. 33.

<sup>100</sup> Simeon, p. 141.

<sup>101</sup> Ronald Reeve, "Simeon's Doctrine of God", in Charles Simeon, 1759-1836, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Michael Hennett (London, 1959), p. 56.

Simeon was not willing, however, to go so far as to state that natural man was capable of doing no good whatsoever.

All good is not so obliterated, but there may be found in many unconverted men as fixed a principle of truth and benevolence, and honor and integrity, as in the generality of true Christians.<sup>102</sup>

What he did believe was that natural man was totally incapable of any spiritual good, though the degree of sin varied from man to man.

We say of man that he is altogether destitute of everything that is truly and spiritually good, and altogether prone to evil, though, in respect of the visible fruits of evil, there is a considerable difference between one and another.<sup>103</sup>

In Simeon's thought, the key to man's salvation was his personal understanding of his existence in this corrupt and fallen state. Without such understanding man could have no hope of salvation.

Man is a fallen creature, guilty, polluted, helpless. The knowledge of this lies at the root of all true religion. In proportion as this is seen and felt, the provision made for our recovery by Jesus Christ will be valued; and in proportion as persons either overlook, or maintain in theory only, this truth, the whole plan of salvation by Christ will be disregarded and despised.<sup>104</sup>

Simeon certainly felt this corruption quite strongly himself, and thus he was not simply speaking in theoretical terms in the above statement. An example of his personal feeling is the statement he made with regard to the general confession

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<sup>102</sup>Carus, p. 461.

<sup>103</sup>Simeon, p. 43.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

of the liturgy.

So deep are my views of my corruption - that I scarcely ever join in the Confession of our Church without perceiving, almost as with my bodily organs, my soul as a dead and putrified carcass; and I join in that acknowledgment 'There is no health in us' in a way that none but God himself can conceive.<sup>105</sup>

This concept of man's total corruption led Simeon directly into the doctrine of salvation, which for him consisted of two necessary actions on the part of man; repentance and faith. Simeon believed that man could not come to faith except through the way of repentance, which he defined in the following way.

By repentance we do not mean that superficial work which consists in saying, 'I am sorry for what I have done', but such a deep sense of our guilt and danger as leads us with all humility of mind to God and stirs us up to a most earnest application to him for mercy. We must feel sins to be a burden to our soul; we must be made to tremble at the wrath of God which we have merited.<sup>106</sup>

This strong emphasis on repentance no doubt grew out of Simeon's own personal experience. In this respect he was probably guilty of falsely considering his own emotional characteristics to be representative of all of mankind, and thereby expected all of mankind to conform to him. Since this most likely was the situation, it explains Simeon's unusual stress on repentance, which is further illustrated in the following statement

Repentence is in every view so desirable, so necessary, so suited to honour God, that I seek that above all .... If I have erred all my days, I cannot err here.

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<sup>105</sup>Carus, p. 304.

<sup>106</sup>Simeon, p. 94.

I am sure that whatever God may despise,... he will not despise the broken and contrite heart.<sup>107</sup>

If one were trying to describe Simeon's doctrine of salvation in some terms other than "Biblical", which he himself no doubt would have preferred, he would have to be called a Moderate Calvinist. The Calvinist influences can be seen in his great stress on man's corruption and in his skeptical attitude toward sanctification and perfection, which will be analyzed a bit later in this chapter. Simeon could not, however, accept the doctrine of reprobation and its associated doctrines, and this distinguished him from the other Calvinists of his day.

At first Simeon could not believe in election because of its close connection to reprobation. He recalled an incident that took place in 1782.

I remember disputing with the Dissenting Minister (in a friendly way) about the doctrine of election. I could not receive the doctrine of election, not being able to separate it from that of reprobation. But I was not violent against it.<sup>108</sup>

Later Simeon came to an acceptance of election as a mysterious truth of God, though he never insisted that salvation depended upon a person's accepting that doctrine. His attitude toward reprobation, however, remained the same.

I am constrained to say that the doctrine of absolute reprobation, that is, of God's forming any persons with an express determination to destroy them, irrespective of any work of theirs, cannot be true.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Douglas Webster, "Simeon's Pastoral Theology", in Charles Simeon, 1759-1836, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Michael Hennell, (London, 1959), p. 98.

<sup>108</sup>Carus, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup>Webster, Douglas, p. 78.

Of course, Simeon's strong emphasis was on justification by faith, which in a sense was what tied man's repentance to God's grace and election. Simeon had a very strong concept of faith which he defined as follows

Faith.... is far more than an acknowledgment of the truth of the Gospel; it is an approbation of it as excellent and an acceptance of it as suitable. Assent is an act of the understanding only; but true faith is a consent of the will also, with the full concurrence of our warmest affections.<sup>110</sup>

Simeon's concept of Biblical theology kept him from getting involved in any faith-works controversy. In a very interesting analysis he demonstrated how both Paul and James were correct and not contradictory to one another. This example provides an excellent illustration of Simeon's theological method.

St. Paul and St. James were writing on two different subjects. St. Paul is proving that a man is not to seek salvation by any righteousness of his own but simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; whereas St. James is proving that the man who professes to have faith in Christ must shew forth his faith by his works.... Thus, according to the two Apostles, a man is justified by faith, because by it he is made righteous; and he is justified by works, because by them he is proved righteous.<sup>111</sup>

Simeon's critical attitude toward sanctification was no doubt greatly influenced by his concept of man's totally corrupt nature and need for continual repentance. He was never able to accept the idea that man could completely escape from this situation, and thus he subsequently played down the doctrine of sanctification.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

If we represent a work of grace as so entire, that there remains no corruption in the person who experiences it, we reduce even the most eminent Christians to despair. There is yet in the best of men a remnant of the flesh lusting against the spirit, and incapacitating him from serving God so entirely and so perfectly as he would.<sup>112</sup>

What Simeon believed to take place in salvation was simply a release of man from the complete dominion of sin, though he would never have claimed that man ceased to be sinful by nature.

Closely connected to this concept of sanctification was Simeon's attitude toward the necessity of assurance. In 1813 he wrote

I think it is clear, even to demonstration, that assurance is not necessary to saving faith; a simple reliance on Christ for salvation is that faith which the word of God requires; assurance is a privilege but not a duty.<sup>113</sup>

In his early years Simeon had apparently been troubled by this matter until he realized the distinction between affiance and assurance. This distinction remained with him throughout his life.

When I found from better information that justifying faith was a faith of affiance, and not a faith of assurance, my peace returned; because though I had not a faith of assurance, I had as full a conviction that I relied on the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation as I had of my own existence.<sup>114</sup>

As a result of this understanding of corruption, repentance, sanctification, and assurance, Simeon was opposed to

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<sup>112</sup>Carus, p. 462.

<sup>113</sup>Webster, Douglas, p. 83.

<sup>114</sup>Carus, p. 303.

any idea of Christian Perfection as a realizable possibility for man. It is important to note, however, that in Simeon's criticism of perfection he is speaking more in terms of perfection as sanctification than as the ethic of Christian Perfection. This was particularly true in the following comment which he made concerning John Wesley.

I love and honour Wesley, yet the Wesleyans are under a delusion as to perfection.... I once heard a man say in the presence of Wesley and others, 'I have known God for 36 years; for 28 years I have never known an evil thought'... Another man acknowledged himself (like me) a sinner; but Wesley and all the rest praised the former man. I said it was a delusion; but it was not my place to argue there and then.<sup>115</sup>

While Simeon was critical of perfection in this sense, his own understanding of the place of perfection in the Christian life came very close to the Wesleyan ethic of Christian Perfection.

He once wrote

We do not say that a Christian must be perfect: for where should we then find a Christian? But he must aim at perfection, and be continually pressing forwards for the attainment of it.<sup>116</sup>

Simeon's moderate Calvinism further led him to a very interesting position concerning the possibility of a Christian falling from grace. While his doctrine of man demanded that he allow for the possibility, his doctrine of God and election told him that such a fall was impossible.

I admit that he (the converted Christian) shall be kept from falling.... I assert that he is in himself as liable to fall as ever, and that it is from

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<sup>115</sup> Webster, Douglas, p. 97.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

a extrinsic source he derives all his stability.<sup>117</sup>

Simeon's emphasis on Scripture did not stop with his theology, but was also the basis of his ethics. It was particularly from St. Paul's writings that he derived the principles that were to be his guide and that were to sustain him during the years of great controversy and opposition at Trinity Church. His complete approach might be said to have been one of proceeding cautiously lest he cause his brother to fall. In 1814 he explained this principle.

I am a great admirer of St. Paul's casuistry in Romans XIV and of his conduct in I Corinthians IX:19-23. I consider self-denial as the principle which we should always have and exercise to its utmost possible extent for the good of others; and that, in many instances, not only temporal advantage, but what would be thought spiritual advantage also, should be sacrificed for the good of others.<sup>118</sup>

This attitude stood Simeon in good stead during his early years at Trinity and enabled him to meet the situation in the following way

In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience. The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind most was this 'the Servant of the Lord must not strive'.... I wished rather to suffer than to act; because in suffering I could not fail to be right; but in acting I might easily do amiss.<sup>119</sup>

Simeon was extremely sensitive to the feelings and needs of others, and thus was always cautious lest he do something that might be misinterpreted. No doubt it was this principle more than anything else that helped him to break down the

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>118</sup>Carus, p. 260.

<sup>119</sup>Moule, p. 39.

opposition at Trinity. Once he wrote the following advice to a young clerical friend who was being very defensive and objectionable over some trouble he had been having with his bishop.

You are very injudicious in this. You should consider that when a storm is raised, you are not the only sufferer. Pray study to maintain peace, though you may make some sacrifices for it.<sup>120</sup>

Finally, mention should be made of Simeon's caution and hesitancy in the area of ethical action. He did not like to jump to fast conclusions without first weighing the various possibilities and results that his action might have. No doubt Simeon met with some criticism for this caution, but he defended his approach in terms of its long range aspects.

It is difficult to embark in a good cause, and to proceed with all moderation that is requisite for its ultimate success. I would run as fast as he; but I want to win the race; and therefore proceed at this part of the course somewhat slower than he. A warm advocate will call this lukewarmness; to me it appears, in existing circumstances, wisdom and prudence.<sup>121</sup>

### C. Doctrine of the Church and Ministry

If Charles Simeon was anything, he was first and foremost a clergyman of the Church of England. Everything that he attempted to do was done with this thought in mind and within this framework. Simeon wanted his evangelicalism to act as a sort of leaven within the Church and in conformity to Church principles. He was very sensitive to the fact that the early eighteenth century evangelical revival had tended to move away

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<sup>120</sup>Carus, p. 221.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

from the Church, and he subsequently wanted to correct this defect. It must be noted, however, that while Simeon's attitude toward the Church was very firm and cordial, his was not a narrow and limited ecclesiasticism.

Simeon's doctrine of the Church was no doubt greatly influenced by the prevailing reformation distinction of the visible and invisible churches; the visible church being little more than God's instrument for promoting the work of the true, invisible church.<sup>122</sup> Simeon's conception of the Church was very individualistic rather than corporate. He understood the word Church to mean little more than a gathering together of individual believers. Thus at one time he defined the Church as "those who flock to Christ as doves to their windows".<sup>123</sup> Simeon further believed that three basic factors grew out of a Christian's relationship to the Church.

From our membership in the body we learn: (1) our duty towards him, (2) our security in him, (3) our happiness through him.<sup>124</sup>

Thus Simeon's basic attitude toward the Church was individualistic rather than corporate. The Church more or less existed for the purpose of serving the individual needs of its members. It was an instrument rather than an end in itself.

Simeon, however, was very quick to defend the Established Church against its critics. He was convinced that the

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<sup>122</sup> Michael Webster, "Simeon's Doctrine of the Church", in Charles Simeon, 1759-1836, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Michael Hennell, (London, 1959), p. 128.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

Church of England was more capable of meeting the needs of Christians than any Dissenting Church, providing its ministers did their job properly. He wrote

Some indeed would entertain prejudice against it (the Established Church), even if all twelve Apostles were members of it, and ministered in it; but in general, it is a wont of zeal in its ministers, and not any wont of purity in its institutions, that gives such an advantage to Dissenters.<sup>125</sup>

One further comment should be made regarding Simeon's concept of establishment. When Simeon visited Scotland at various times (1796, 1798, 1815, and 1819) he normally accepted invitations to preach in both Anglican and Presbyterian Churches. Following his 1798 trip, he met with a good bit of criticism for having attended and participated in the Presbyterian services. Simeon defended his actions in the following way.

Presbyterianism is as much the established religion in North Britain as Episcopacy is in the South.... As an Episcopalian, therefore, I preached in Episcopal Chapels, and as a member of the Established Church I preached in the Presbyterian Churches. If the King... were in Scotland, he would of necessity attend at a Presbyterian Church there, as he does at an Episcopalian Church here. And I look upon it as an incontrovertible position that where the King must attend a clergyman may preach.<sup>126</sup>

Sacramentally the evangelicals were receptionists, and Simeon was no exception. Indeed, his understanding of both baptism and communion had strong receptionist tendencies in them.

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<sup>125</sup> Michael Hennell, "Simeon and the Ministry", in Charles Simeon, 1759-1836, (London, 1959), p. 155.

<sup>126</sup> Moule, p. 117.

Simeon spoke of baptism as being a change of state rather than a change of nature, and to prove this he continually referred to the scriptural example of Simon Magus. His argument was

Baptism is.... a change of state, for by it we become entitled to all the blessings of the new covenant. But it is not a change of nature. A change of nature may be communicated at the time that the ordinance is administered. But the ordinance itself does not communicate it now, anymore than in the apostolic age. Simon Magus was baptized, and yet remained in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity as much after his baptism as he was before.<sup>127</sup>

This does not mean that Simeon was critical of the practice of baptism, but rather only that he insisted it be understood and interpreted properly. The Church of England probably had no stronger supporter in this matter.

I would on no account deprecate baptism, or detract from its importance. It is necessary for all who embrace the faith of Christ:... But if we receive it not aright, we are still like Simon Magus in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.<sup>128</sup>

Further, Simeon's concept of baptism being a change of state rather than a change of nature made him a strong advocate of infant baptism. He believed that the change of state, which was an entitling to the blessings of the new covenant, was as valid for children as it was for adults.

If God has not deprived children of being admitted into covenant with him, who are we, that we should take it from them? By thus robbing them of their privileges, we represent Jesus Christ as less merciful to children now, than he was to the children of Jewish parents.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Simeon, p. 58.

<sup>128</sup>Webster, Douglas, p. 106.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

Simeon's great contribution with regard to communion was not so much what he said about it as what he did with it. Simeon's concept of Holy Communion differed little from the standard thinking of his day. He defined communion as being

a memento of the death of Christ and a medium of communion with Christ, whose body and blood we feed upon in the sacred elements, and by whom we are strengthened for all holy obedience.<sup>130</sup>

However, Simeon was one of the great pioneers in restoring Holy Communion to its central place in Anglican worship. His attitude and practice were summed up in the following words

To come to the Lord's table, as many do, at the three great festivals of the Church, and to neglect it all the year besides, is to shew at once that they enter not into the true spirit of that ordinance.<sup>131</sup>

Undoubtedly the one thing that Simeon loved in Anglicanism more than anything else was its liturgy. While Simeon approved of extemporary prayers for informal meetings and family use, he insisted upon the liturgical form for public gatherings.<sup>132</sup> To those who criticized liturgical worship because of its deadness, Simeon replied

The deadness and formality experienced in the worship of the church arise far more from the low state of our graces than from any defect in our Liturgy. If only we had our hearts deeply penitent and contrite, I know from my experience.... that no prayers in the world could be better suited to our wants or more delightful to our souls.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>132</sup>Davies, p. 217.

<sup>133</sup>Moule, p. 26.

It would appear that Simeon often could not seem to find words adequate for expressing his admiration of the liturgy. For example, upon his return to Cambridge after his third trip to Scotland, he commented

On all three times that I have visited Scotland, and have attended almost entirely the Presbyterian Churches, I have on my return to the use of our Liturgy been perfectly astonished at the vast superiority of our mode of worship, and felt it an inestimable privilege that we possess a form of sound words so adapted in every respect to the wants and desires of all who would worship God in spirit and in truth.<sup>134</sup>

While further examples reflecting Simeon's feelings could go on indefinitely, only two more will be stated.

The Liturgy (is) as superior to all modern compositions as the work of a philosopher on any deep subject is to that of a schoolboy who understands scarcely anything about it.<sup>135</sup>

Never do I find myself nearer to God than I often am in the reading desk. The finest sight short of heaven would be a whole congregation using the prayers of the Liturgy in the true spirit of them.<sup>136</sup>

With regard to Church Order, Simeon tried very hard and was successful in remaining an orthodox Anglican. By doing so, he was able to help redirect the evangelical revival within the formal structure of the Established Church. His influence in this respect was a product of his understanding of the work and relationship of the clergy and laity.

Though in his early years Simeon had been tempted to undertake an itinerant ministry, he later became a strong

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>135</sup>Webster, Douglas, p. 84.

<sup>136</sup>Moule, p. 85.

advocate of the necessity of a clergyman to remain within parish boundaries. His attitude was summed up as follows.

A preacher has enough to do in his own parish: if it be too small, let him seek a larger; but let him always exert himself in his own parish.<sup>137</sup>

Simeon's reasoning in this respect was quite simple. He realized that as an individual he could not even begin to reach everyone with his message himself. But he did hope that he would be able to reach many people in Cambridge who in time would leave Cambridge and witness to Christ elsewhere. In this way he hoped to see Christianity spread. He once explained this rationale in the following way.

Trinity Church holds about 900,.... but many of those who hear me are legions in themselves, because they are going forth to preach, or else to fill stations of influence in society. In that view I look upon my position here as the highest and most important in the kingdom, nor would I exchange it for any other.<sup>138</sup>

Simeon's only Achille's heel in this matter of Church Order was the problem of lay societies. This problem originated soon after Simeon came to Trinity Church and in the midst of the opposition. Simeon realized that he would have to provide further instruction for his converts, but he was hindered by the fact that he was not allowed to use the facilities of the church except on Sunday morning. Thus he took the only available alternative, though realizing the danger in doing so.

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<sup>137</sup>Arthur Pollard, "The Influence and Significance of Simeon's Work", in Charles Simeon 1759-1836, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Michael Hennell, (London, 1959), p. 164.

<sup>138</sup>Hennell, p. 140.

If those whose minds were impressed by my preaching had not some opportunity of further instruction, they would infallibly go to the dissenting meetings, and thus be gradually drawn away from the Church. The only alternative I had was to meet them in a private room.... I was sensible that it would be regarded by many as irregular; but what was to be done? I could not instruct them in my church; and I must of necessity have them all drawn away by the dissenters, if I did not meet them myself.<sup>139</sup>

So successful were these meetings that Simeon soon had to break them up into six groups on the basis of age and sex. Fortunately little difficulty was caused by them, and as the opposition diminished the groups were gradually allowed to meet in Trinity Church.

At only one future time did this general practice create any further difficulty for Simeon. During the period when Bishop Dampier was attempting to interfere in the work at Trinity Church, some criticism was raised against a group of parishioners who were holding a weekly prayer meeting in a church room. Simeon did not really approve of these meetings, for he felt that the participants did more "expounding and preaching than prayer and Bible study".<sup>140</sup> Thus he advised that the one large meeting in the church be replaced by three or four smaller meetings at homes, thereby hoping to destroy the impression that these meetings were directly connected to his ministry. He met with much opposition from the participants in these meetings, and it subsequently took three years for

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<sup>139</sup>Moule, p. 46.

<sup>140</sup>Carus, p. 189.

him to resolve the matter. This experience left him very skeptical of the practice of allowing the laity to conduct their own meetings.

The people should never, if it can be avoided, be left to themselves. The moment they are, there is danger of unhallowed kind of emulation rising up among them; and those, who by reason of their natural forwardness are not unfit to lead, will always obtrude themselves as leaders among them; whilst the modest and timid will be discouraged, because they cannot experience those gifts which they behold in others.<sup>141</sup>

#### D. Issues and Involvements

The one great, prevailing theological issue in evangelical circles of Simeon's day was the Calvinist - Arminian controversy. As has been noted earlier Simeon himself was basically a Calvinist, but he refused to get drawn into the controversy. He rather sought to find some common line between these two positions on the basis of Biblical theology. His work toward this end was most commendable and helped to save future generations from excessive involvement in the conflict.

Simeon saw both the Calvinist and Arminian positions firmly grounded in Scripture, and thus he refused to do more than simply assert the Biblical principles involved.

If I were asked 'Are you a Calvinist?' I should answer 'No'. - 'Are you and Arminian?' - 'No'. 'What then are you?' I should answer 'A Bible Christian'... And if any tell me, 'You are wrong', I reply, 'Tell Paul so, and Peter so, for I am misled by them'.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>142</sup>Dell, p. 32.

Simeon obviously felt that to take any other position than this would have been to place system above Scripture, and he was definitely opposed to that course of action. He commented further on this in his preface to the *HORAE HOMILETICAE*.

It is an invariable rule with him (the author) to endeavour to give to every portion of the Word of God its full and proper force, without considering what scheme it favours, or whose system it is likely to advance. Of this he is sure, that there is not a decided Calvinist or Arminian in the world who equally approves of the word of Scripture.... who, if he had been in the company of St. Paul whilst he was writing his different Epistles, would not have recommended him to alter one or other of his expressions.<sup>143</sup>

In his attempt to reconcile the controversy on a Scriptural basis, Simeon did not suggest a via media approach. Rather he made use of the concept of paradox, which he explained as follows

When two opposite principles are each clearly contained in the Bible, truth does not lie in taking what is called the golden mean, but in steadily adopting both extremes, and as a pendulum, oscillating, but not vacillating, between the two.<sup>144</sup>

Simeon further clarified this approach in the following specific statement

Sometimes I am a high Calvinist, at other times a low Arminian, so that if extremes will please you, I am your man; only remember, it is not one extreme that we are to go to, but both extremes.<sup>145</sup>

What no doubt greatly troubled Simeon about this

<sup>143</sup>Moule, p. 79.

<sup>144</sup>Dell, p. 32.

<sup>145</sup>Carus, p. 352.

Calvinist-Arminian debate was its apparently superficial quality on the theological level. Simeon understood the theological issues that were involved, but he further realized that both the Arminians and the Calvinists, after all the theological debating was finished, held to essentially the same beliefs about God and man. This realization undoubtedly inspired Simeon in his efforts to reconcile the controversy. He wrote

Pious men, both of the Calvinist and Arminian persuasion, approximate very nearly when they are upon their knees before God in prayer: the devout Arminian then acknowledging his total dependence upon God as strongly as the most confirmed Calvinist; and the Calvinist acknowledging his responsibility to God and his obligation to exertion, in terms as decisive as the most determined Arminian.<sup>146</sup>

Before concluding this study of Simeon, attention should be given to two further areas of endeavor in which he was greatly involved. These were his involvement in mission and missionary societies and his work at Cambridge University.

Simeon was directly involved in either the founding and/or the work of three societies: The Church Missionary Society (1799), The British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and The London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews (1809).<sup>147</sup>

The Church Missionary Society was founded for the purpose of introducing Christianity to the pagan world, particularly India. Simeon's chief contribution along this line

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>147</sup> G. C. B. Davies, "Simeon in the Setting of the Evangelical Revival", in Charles Simeon 1759-1836, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Michael Hennell, (London, 1959), p. 18.

was his recruiting of qualified Cambridge men to serve as Chaplains to the East India Company. In a letter written in 1829 Simeon commented

Almost all the good men who have gone to India as Chaplains these forty years have been recommended by me.<sup>148</sup>

Particularly prominent among these recruits were Henry Martyn, Thomas Thomason, and Daniel Corrie, First Bishop of Madras.

Simeon believed strongly in the need for such missionary efforts, and in a sermon preached before the Society on June 8, 1802, he replied to the criticism of the opponents of the Society.

It may be said, perhaps, 'Why are we to waste our strength upon the heathen? Is there not scope for the labours of all at home?' I answer, 'It is well for us that the Apostles did not argue thus; for if they had not turned to the Gentiles till there remained no unconverted Jews, the very name of Christ would probably long since have been forgotten amongst men. Besides, the more our love abounds towards the heathen, the more will the zeal of others be provoked for the salvation of our neighbors'.<sup>149</sup>

It was almost inevitable that Simeon's great stress on Scripture would lead to his work in the British and Foreign Bible Society and its efforts to translate the Bible into foreign languages. Simeon's chief contribution to this Society was introducing it to and backing its cause in Cambridge. This was no easy matter, since the Society was independent of the Church of England and also since the officials of the

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<sup>148</sup>Moule, p. 100.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

University were opposed to societies in general. However, in 1811 Simeon managed to get the Society established in Cambridge.

Simeon's participation in the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews grew out of his strong concern for converting the Jews to Christ. He made many trips to Holland, Paris, and Ireland because of this concern, and was involved in the project of translating the New Testament into Hebrew. So strong was Simeon's conviction that he wrote a paper showing the importance of this matter on his death bed. The opening words of that paper perhaps give a clue to the reasons for his involvement in the enterprise.

I wish to show you what grounds we have for humiliations, in that we have been so unlike to God in our regards towards His fallen people.<sup>150</sup>

Simeon's work at Cambridge University consisted primarily of the informal meetings he held in his rooms for those undergraduates who intended to become clergymen. These meetings took place on Friday evenings from 6:00 to 7:00 P.M., with the undergraduates free to come and ask any questions they desired.<sup>151</sup> Simeon also held Bible study and Sermon classes on occasion. Since he lived in the Fellow's building at King's College, Simeon was easily accessible to those undergraduates who desired his help and guidance.

While such efforts may seem relatively minor and

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

unimpressive today, it must be remembered that in Simeon's day no other training for the ministry was provided at Cambridge. Simeon thus tried to meet the needs of these students as a sort of one man theological faculty. Without such efforts, preparation for the ministry at Cambridge would have differed little from preparation for any other field. Simeon was thus one of the first individuals to realize and attempt to do something about the particular needs of the student preparing for orders at Cambridge.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In attempting to make any comparison between such men as John Wesley and Charles Simeon, one must inevitably turn to the task of determining to what extent the men shaped the historical situation in which they lived and to what extent they were shaped by that history. At many points this becomes a most difficult undertaking, with only a thin line separating the shaper from the shaped. Wesley and Simeon are no exceptions to this rule.

No doubt the greatest personal difference between the two men involved their basic theological orientations. Wesley was basically an Arminian, whereas Simeon was basically a Calvinist (though both men would have objected to being called such). This theological difference resulted in several distinctive characteristics of each man; characteristics that greatly determined the effect that each man was to have upon his generation. For example, Wesley believed that it was possible for man to attain a state of complete sanctification and thus encouraged such striving. Simeon in turn was very skeptical of the idea, and instead put far greater stress upon repentance than did Wesley. Indeed, Simeon was openly critical of the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection, whenever

perfection was used in the sense of meaning sanctification. Wesley's particular stress on sanctification and its related doctrines was the source of much controversy with members of the Church of England and contributed significantly to the Methodist drift into separatism.

With regard to ethics, Wesley was essentially a Christian Perfectionist, whereas Simeon followed the Pauline ethic of "proceeding cautiously lest he cause his brother to fall". Simeon's concept of a Biblical theology as well as his extreme sensitivity to the feelings of others contributed to this ethical position, which was most influential in helping him meet controversy from within the Church without departing from the Church's official structure. Simeon did not so much disagree with Wesley's ethic of Christian Perfection as he simply put more stress on the casuistry involved in ethical behavior.

It is also informative to compare the conversion experiences of the two men. Wesley's conversion followed many years of earnest striving and took place in the midst of people. Simeon's conversion came quite abruptly after his arrival at Cambridge and occurred in almost complete isolation. Further, the result of Wesley's conversion was his early stress upon assurance and his belief that a person should be able to pinpoint the exact moment when he passed into a state of salvation. Simeon stressed neither, and indeed would not even specify the day of his conversion, though he knew it had occurred during the season of Lent and Passiontide, 1779.

From these various factors one can fairly conclude that

Wesley was far more optimistic concerning the possibilities of man than was Simeon. This optimism was needed, for without it Wesley would probably not even have dared to begin to try to change the religious situation in eighteenth century England. By Simeon's time, however, the unfavorable results of such evangelism had become apparent, and it called for a man who was willing to proceed more cautiously and slowly to direct the movement back within the church structure. Simeon, of course, was such a man, and because of this he was able to shape the direction in which the Anglican Evangelicals of his generation were to move. It was thus in this general sense that the personalities of Wesley and Simeon affected the historical situation in which they lived and made them key figures in their respective times.

Having stated this, however, one must immediately reverse himself and point to the way in which the historical situations shaped the two men.

The main distinction along this line is simply that Wesley lived in a generation that had never heard the evangelical message, whereas by Simeon's time in the next generation evangelicalism was tending to ignore and lose sight of the values of the more traditional forms of Christianity. Thus while Wesley's generation needed evangelicalism to awaken the Church of England out of its stupor, Simeon's generation needed the modifying influence of the formal church structure to keep the evangelical fervor in bounds and to prevent it from becoming an end in itself. Needless to say,

both Wesley and Simeon responded to the needs of their respective generations.

Wesley immediately took it upon himself to convert all of England regardless of, or perhaps one should say in spite of, the formal structure of the Church of England. Simeon in turn chose to operate from within a parish structure, realizing his limitations and believing that he could contribute far more to Christianity in this way. Thus while Wesley tried to evangelize all of England personally, Simeon was content to confine his personal evangelism to Cambridge.

Also by Simeon's generation the Church of England was really just beginning to become aware of the world-wide need for Christian mission. Simeon responded by becoming actively involved in this enterprise. This was in marked contrast to Wesley in the previous generation who, after his experience with the American Indian, had no overwhelming interest in what is normally thought of as foreign mission. Wesley was rather more concerned with the awakening of England herself.

Further, Wesley took an active part in the Calvinist-Free grace controversy of his day. Simeon chose not to get involved, but rather was willing to admit that on a Scriptural basis both arguments were valid and beneficial to Christianity.

In conclusion, the development of Anglican Evangelicalism from the generation of John Wesley to the generation of Charles Simeon took what might be called a Hegelian form. The Church of England in the eighteenth century was drifting along on a course that was making it more and more complacent,

worldly, and completely ignorant or unaware of the vast changes that were taking place in English society. In reaction to this "Thesis", John Wesley provided the "Antithesis" of the early Methodist movement, which was shaped by a combination of Wesley's personal characteristics and the historical situation in which he found himself living. By the next generation the time was ripe for a "Synthesis", which was provided to a large extent by the influence of Charles Simeon. Like that of Wesley, Simeon's influence was the product of both his personal characteristics and the historical situation of his generation. The "Synthesis" characterized by Simeon, rather than the development of Methodism, was the historically valid result of the original Wesleyan thrust and swung the movement of evangelicism back into loyalty to the Established Church; a loyalty that Wesley had called for all along.

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